

THE AMERICAN BOARD AND THE NEW THEOLOGY.

J. H. PETTINGELL.

THE following article was written for the *Congregationalist*, but was rejected. In sending it to the *Crisis* for publication, a few words of explanation may be proper. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was organized some seventy-five years ago, and is the oldest and the largest Foreign Missionary Board in this country. Its affairs have been administered with remarkable wisdom and discretion, and with a large measure of success. It is not an Ecclesiastical Board, but a self-perpetuating corporation. In the beginning, the various Presbyterian bodies united with the Congregationalists in supporting it. But these Presbyterian supporters have gradually withdrawn, and now contribute almost exclusively to their own Ecclesiastical Boards, leaving it in the hands of its Congregational friends.

During the anti-slavery agitation previous to the war, this Board was somewhat divided with respect to the true policy to be pursued on the question of Slavery and Polygamy in its missions. Although the majority were in favor of taking positive Christian ground, its action was so slow as to give occasion

for the formation of the American Missionary Association, as a kind of protest against its conservative policy. The operations of this new Board are exerted almost, if not quite, exclusively in behalf of the colored races in this country.

The harmony of the supporters of the old American Board is now in danger of being again disturbed by the rise of what is called the New Theology; especially on the question of the after-state of the heathen who die without having had a fair offer of the gospel. This New Theology appears to have its headquarters at the Theological Seminary at Andover, Mass. It has its sympathizers among Congregationalists in all parts of the country. They entertain what is called a *larger hope* for those who die in their sins, especially for those who have not had what they call a *fair chance* in this life. With some, and possibly with most of them, this hope may be regarded as leading to a belief in the general restoration and final salvation of all men. On this point they are not very explicit, but they decidedly object to the doctrinal basis on which the Board has hitherto conducted its mission; namely, that the heathen who die without a knowledge of the gospel deserve eternal torment, and that this is their inevitable doom; that however necessary the gospel may be to their temporal welfare, they deny that it is absolutely necessary to their eternal salvation. Hence they demand that the officers of the Board should relax the severity of their examination in favor of missionary candidates who entertain these new views. It is only quite recently that this de-

mand has been made. There were some intimations of it at the great Annual Meeting in Boston, last October. It will no doubt receive more attention at the next meeting at the West. To what it will grow remains to be seen. Our religious newspapers have taken up the question somewhat earnestly, notably the *Christian Union*, in behalf of the New Theology, and the *Congregationalist* in behalf of the traditional policy of the Board. As an old friend of the Board, and for many years one of the District Secretaries, and especially as one who agrees with neither party in the assumption of the natural and inevitable immortality of sinners, which lies at the very foundation of this difficulty, I have taken a deep interest in this incipient discussion.

I ventured, therefore, to send the following letter to the *Congregationalist*, hoping that this conflict of views among Christian brethren might be made the means, in the good providence of God, of opening the eyes of both parties to the great philosophical error which they hold in common, and which does, and ever must, so sadly interfere with the preaching of a true gospel, either in Christian or in heathen lands. Though not permitted to speak to them through their own organs, I would hope I may reach some of them in this way.

*To the Editor of the Congregationalist:—My Dear Brother:—*I beg that you will allow one who is heartily with you in your support of the American Board, and in your opposition to the new doctrine of a probation beyond this life, and a *post-mortem*

salvation for the heathen, to say a few words on this question, in which we are all so much interested, through your excellent paper.

I most fully indorse the sentiments expressed in the timely letters of Prof. Phelps and Dr. Hamlin in this Journal of July 15th and 22nd, and other articles in the same line ; and I have especially rejoiced to know that Secretary Alden and his associates show no signs of yielding to the demands which our neological brethren are making on them in this matter. But it seems to me that you all are overlooking, or keeping in abeyance, the real vital question in this issue—a question that lies at the root of the difficulty, and which must be ventilated and settled before we can hope for peace and union on any secure foundation, namely : What is meant by *salvation*? or in other words, What is the doom to which the unsaved are exposed? Is it the perpetuation of a sinful life in hopeless, endless misery? or, Is it actual and eternal death, after they shall have been judged and found unfit for the life that is eternal? With those who insist on the natural and inevitable immortality of all men—saints and sinners alike—there are but these two alternatives : an endless life of purity and blessedness ; or an endless life—or existence if you will—in sin and misery.

But this latter alternative seems to cast such a reproach upon the Author of our being, and is so shocking to the sensitive nature of not a few Christian men, when they come to consider what is involved in such a doom, that they feel driven to seek some method of relief for their burdened

hearts; and they first begin to hope, and then to believe, that there may be, yea, there must be found in the infinite wisdom and mercy of God, some way—whether revealed in his Word or not—by which “poor immortal sinners” will be rescued from so dreadful a doom. We could have no disposition to reproach them for such sentiments, and would forbear even to oppose them, were not the Scriptures so decidedly against them, and were not their doctrine so evidently misleading and demoralizing in its tendency.

But we do think that those who venture to advance these unwarranted speculations of “another chance hereafter” for sinners who are not saved in this life, especially for the heathen; and those who, on the other hand, would hold us to the traditional doctrine, which I cannot but think to be equally unwarranted and erroneous, of an endless, hopeless future of sin and misery for all the unsaved, are alike blameworthy for so entirely ignoring the *third* alternative, which lies everywhere on the very surface of all Scripture, and is repeated with such explicit emphasis in the gospel—of *no eternal life whatever apart from Christ its only Source*; that Christ came not merely to save from sin and misery, its necessary result, but to fit men for that better, higher life which is eternal, and to impart it to them by a renewal of their nature; but that men, failing of this, must not only be miserable as sinners, so long as they continue to live, but that they must necessarily, sooner or later, perish utterly in their own corruption; for “sin when it is finished bringeth

forth death"; that the only alternative to a life that is eternal—which, not the first, but the second Adam alone can give—is death, absolute and eternal.

No reason can be given why these plain Scriptural terms should not be taken to mean what they literally express but this: the Grecian philosophy of the deathless, indestructible nature of man, that was so early introduced into the Christian Church, *forbids* it; and so, to accommodate this heathen philosophy, all these Scripture terms that predicate death and destruction to sinners must be construed in such an ethical, non-natural sense as to leave the sinner in a state of conscious, hopeless, unending misery, even after he has been judicially consigned to death and destruction!

True, there is a sense in which Christ is the Saviour of all men; for he has redeemed the entire race of Adam from that natural death that comes upon all his posterity irrespective of their individual deserts; but this only brings them by a resurrection before the bar of God, to answer for the deeds done in the body—their own sins as individuals; and no one has any warrant for saying or believing that there has been, or will be any way of escape from that "second death" to which all sinners are exposed, excepting by repentance and faith, and a personal acceptance of the terms of salvation now offered in the gospel. Indeed, the Scriptures explicitly declare that "There is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life." "But how shall they *believe* in him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach except they be sent?" Hence the necessity of missions to the heathen. We are also told that even Cornelius, who was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway," needed to have Peter sent to him to tell him words whereby he and all his house should be *saved* (*have life*—Syriac version). Acts 10 : 2 ; 11 : 14.

It is inexpressibly sad to see so-called Christian men, in the face of the plainest teaching of God's Word, trying to show how the better sort of heathen, and even the rejectors of Christ and his gospel in Christian lands—as, for example, in the case of Sir Montefiore—may be saved by their own moral goodness ; and all this because, under the stress of their false philosophy of the imperishable nature of man, they cannot believe it would be just in God to consign such men to a doom of endless misery. But why should they believe this? It is not a question of desert, but of unmerited grace. The simple question is, Have they been born again? which is the inexorable condition of entrance into the kingdom of God. Have they attained to eternal life through repentance and faith which unites mortal men to Him who is the only source of this new life? If not, they are still mortal, perishable creatures, however moral they may be.

The gospel then is this proclamation of a new, divinely provided way of eternal life ; a gospel

which is honorable alike to the justice and mercy of God, and which reflects infinite glory on Christ the Saviour of mortal men ; a gospel which commends itself to the conscience of every man, whether Christian or heathen, and which may be boldly preached to perishing men everywhere as the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; a gospel that offers no hard, severe points that need to be concealed or apologized for ; which is indeed humbling to the pride of man who claims with arrogance to be as immortal as his Maker, but which shows him a way, the only way, of attaining to that endless life which all men desire.

It is not my purpose to argue this matter in your columns ; but may I not hope to be permitted, as one who loves the American Board and the cause of missions to which it is devoted, and who would fain see its supporters multiplied, and all united in prosecuting its indispensable work in harmony and with increasing success, to call their attention to this important aspect of the case in your valuable paper ?

I am very sincerely yours in the faith of the gospel, as the only hope of perishing men,

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Late Dist. Sec. A. B. C. F. M.

Issued at 144 Hanover Street, Boston, Mass.,
 BY THE ADVENT CHRISTIAN PUBLICATION SOCIETY.
 J. HEMENWAY, Agent.